



# Inaugural Addresses

## Comparing and Contrasting Inaugural Addresses

**E**very four years, the United

States marks the commencement of a new presidential term. During this ceremony, the President of the United States has an opportunity to speak and inform citizens of his or her objectives as leader of the country. This speech is known as the *inaugural address*.

Each inaugural address is unique, delivered by a particular president at a particular moment in time. The shortest, George Washington's 2<sup>nd</sup> inaugural address was only 135 words. William Henry Harrison's inaugural address, by contrast, was nearly 8,500 words!

Four presidents at one time called Illinois home – Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama. Each presided over the country at a unique time in U.S. history, and this can be seen in the messages they communicated to the nation in their inaugural addresses. All four were reelected to a second term in office. Analysis of each president's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> inaugural addresses provides an opportunity to compare and contrast the priorities, goals and intentions he outlined, as well as how the nation may have been changing at that time.

### Abraham Lincoln

When Abraham Lincoln took office on March 4, 1861, it was a time of crisis. Southern states had begun the process of seceding from the Union over the issue of slavery. Within months, the nation would be divided in a Civil War.

By the time of Lincoln's 2<sup>nd</sup> inauguration on March 4, 1865, the Civil War was almost over. Lincoln remained committed to emancipation, and anticipated a time of reconstruction and healing ahead.

### Ulysses S. Grant

On March 4, 1869, Ulysses S. Grant succeeded Andrew Johnson as President of the United States. Though Grant had served as Acting Secretary of War under Johnson, their relationship had soured as Johnson's scheming to rid his cabinet of former Secretary of War Edwin Stanton led to a fight with Congress and presidential impeachment proceedings. The country was in turbulent times, as Southern Democrats advocated for the end of Reconstruction,

and Northern Republicans advocated for African-American enfranchisement.

By the 1872 election, the Fifteenth Amendment (prohibiting the government from denying a citizen the right to vote based on racial discrimination) had been ratified. Dissatisfaction with Reconstruction was strong enough to unite Southern Democrats with Liberal Republicans, who together nominated Horace Greeley to oppose the Republican-nominated Grant. Despite their combined efforts, Grant won reelection by a wide margin. His second term in office began March 4, 1873.

### Ronald Reagan

When Ronald Reagan took office on January 20, 1981, the country was in the midst of a 'stagflation' economy, with high unemployment and inflation rates, and low economic growth rates. The Iran hostage crisis, ongoing for over a year and testing US diplomatic relationships, was ended minutes after Reagan took the oath of office.

Reagan advocated "peace through strength," and through his first term in office led a record-setting defense buildup. By the end of his first term, the Cold War had escalated, and the threat of nuclear war had reached new heights. A recession from the early years of Reagan's presidency had ended and he was reelected, beginning his second term January 21, 1985.

### Barack Obama

Barack Obama became the first African-American President of the United States on January 20, 2009. At the time, the United States was in the midst of a global financial crisis. The country was also enmeshed in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By January 20, 2013, the beginning of Obama's second term in office, the recession and the Iraq War had ended. Obama's chief policy accomplishment, the Affordable Care Act, remained politically controversial.

## Procedure:

Begin the activity with a brief discussion about inaugural addresses. Ask students if they have heard any in their lifetime, or read any from the past. What do students think a president is trying to communicate or accomplish in his or her inaugural address?

Break the class into four groups. Each group will work together to compare and contrast the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> inaugural addresses given by Lincoln, Grant, Reagan, or Obama. Ensure each person has a copy of their president's addresses, and each group has a Venn Diagram Analysis Worksheet. Brief context is provided for each President, but allow students to use textual clues to make historical inferences and analyze the speeches.

After reading their assigned addresses (either individually or as a small group), have each group work together to discuss and analyze the two addresses, making notes on their Venn Diagram. Instruct them to look for similarities and differences in tone, content, etc. Use the questions provided to spur discussion. Have students identify overarching categories of similarities and differences, which they can list on their Venn Diagram Analysis Worksheet. Ensure that groups are able to provide textual support for every claim.

After the groups have completed their analyses, have the students present their findings to the rest of the class.

## Questions to consider:

- What is the tone of each speech?
- What topics are covered? Are seen as important?
  - What has changed from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup>?
  - What has stayed the same?
- What can you infer about the state of the nation from each speech?
  - What changed?
- How does the President use rhetoric to make his points?
  - How does he use word choice, sentence structure, metaphor, etc. to maximize impact?
- What does the President reference with the speech? Why?
- What is the President trying to accomplish as President?
- What is the President trying to accomplish in the speech?

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**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Materials:**

- Copies of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> inaugural addresses (Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Ronald Reagan, Barack Obama)
- Venn Diagram Analysis Worksheet

**Objectives:**

As a result of this activity students will be able to:

- Define the term inaugural address
- Work productively in small groups
- Compare and contrast the inaugural speeches of a former President of the United States
- Present analysis to their peers

**Illinois Learning Standards**

**English/Language Arts**

*CCR Reading Standards for*

*Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details:* 1. Cite Strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

*CCR Reading Standards for*

*Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details:* 3. Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

*CCR Reading Standards for*

*Informational Text: Craft and Structure:*

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

*CCR Reading Standards for*

*Informational Text: Craft and Structure:*

5. Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text.

*CCR Reading Standards for*

*Informational Text: Craft and Structure:*

6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

*CCR Reading Standards for*

*Informational Text: Integration of*

*Knowledge and Ideas:* 9. Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance, including how they address related themes and concepts.

*CCR Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge:* 9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

*CCR Speaking and Listening:*

*Comprehension and Collaboration:* 1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

*CCR Speaking and Listening:*

*Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:* 4.

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

*CCR Language: Conventions of*

*Standard English:* 1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**Social Science**

SS.IS.4.9-12: Gather and evaluate information from multiple sources while considering the origin, credibility, point of view, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources.

SS.IS.5.9-12: Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to revise or strengthen claims.

SS.H.1.9-12: Evaluate how historical developments were shaped by time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

SS.H.2.9-12: Analyze change and continuity within and across historical eras.

**Extension 1:** Have the groups research the state of the nation preceding each inaugural address. Use this information to inform their analysis. How might have the political environment influence each speech? How can historical and political changes be seen in the comparison between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> addresses?

**Extension 2:** After group discussions and analysis, have each student write a 2-3 page paper comparing and contrasting the two speeches.